

REMINISCENCES FROM THE LIFE OF ATHANASIOUS KARLIN: HISTORY OF THE VOLGA GERMANS AND WHY THEY LEFT RUSSIA

What I can still remember of Russia, what I have heard and seen.

"Empress Katharina II of Russia made a proclamation and promises to the Germans in 1762-1763 so that many Germans immigrated to Russia. She made manifest that all German settlers would be free from taxes for the country (land) which they got donated by the government and that all money should be tax exempted for 30 years and also free from military service. They promised furthermore freedom of religion. Upon these promises my foreparents settled at Katharinenstadt. Katharinenstadt had been founded by Baron Beauregard from whom the village had received its name Baronsky. Katharinenstadt ist 90 Werft north of Saratow in the government Samara on the south side on the Wolga river. The Wolga is one of the nicest rivers I saw. This river is $1\frac{1}{2}$ Werft or a mile broad; in Spring it flooded the coast even to our place where we lived and the water tore much of the embankment away that we were forced one day to move our farm buildings further back. Katharinenstadt was situated on the meadow-site and had much nice land as pastures for the village flocks, for horses Dabon, cows and sheep Dabonen. The fields were measured out in pieces of 4 Desadienen (1 Desadin is $3\frac{1}{2}$ acre) and they were changed (by drawing lots.) Every family, no matter how large or little, received not more than 21 Desadienen land, Prairie, meadows and potato land included. To a family belonged also the 3 or 4 married brothers in the same house.

"We, that is, my father and uncle Karl had bought another tract of land besides. We called it the Saburovs land because we bought it from a nobleman by name of Saburov. It was located between the creek (Mitschet) and the big Karman river, 50 Werft from Katharinenstadt. It comprised 58 Desadienen or 203 acre, beautiful land but it still was not enough for our family and we had to rent some fields every year, for our big family.

Katharinenstadt was a nice village but by now it had grown to be a city. It

had nice stores, a big market-place. Every Monday was market-day and all kind of goods was sold. There was a very big lumberyard near the Wolga river, and 40 or more granaries (wheat Amagaren). The wheat was shipped by boats along the Wolga to the cities. Katharinenstadt had 3 big beautiful stone-churches. The Lutheran, a Russian church was the biggest and nicest. Our Catholic church came next; the pastor was Father Raymund Andreasjekowitsch, a Polish priest. He left the parish the same fall we moved away, after having attended to the community for 25 years. He went to Astragan where he also died. R.I.P.

"The reasons for our emigration were first, not enough land and second, the successive emperors did not keep the promise which Empress Katharine had once made to the Germans.

"Emperor Alexander II demanded from the first Germans military service in 1874, if not, they had to leave the country within 10 years time. My brother Jakob would have had to draw the lot for military service by fall 1875, and so we decided to emigrate at once. Furthermore, the third reason was because we were afraid of losing our freedom in the practise of our religion. The priests could no longer preach as they wanted. They had to write down every sermon for inspection by Russian officials, in order to find anything against the Russian faith."

Preparations for Departure

"But where to go? To North America. Therefore two deputies were sent over to America, Joseph Exner from Obermungor and my uncle Jakob Bissing. The two traveled up to Larned, Kansas. They came back in the earlier part of March 1875 and did however bring no good news. They said, there is enough open country in Kansas and we could get it cheap too, even 80 acre "Heimstadten" for nothing, but we didn't like it in America, everything is too wild and strange. To us, it was alright as long as we could get good and cheap grounds. Well, let's go. So we started at once with the selling. We got a good price for everything. We sold 15 horses,

each for 30-70 Rubel, 5 cows each 20-35 Rubel, 5 wagons each 20 to 60 Rubel, harnesses, plows and other farm implements as well as house furnishings, everything brought in a good sum, because we were the first ones of Katharinenstadt who sold to Johann Simon Emerich for 1880 Rubel, the Saburows-land our half share, 29 Desadienen (101½ acre) to uncle Karl Karlin for 1300 Rubel. When everything had been sold and my brother, who did not want to move yet, had received his share, my father tried to get out our part from the community capital amounting to 800 Rubel. But we couldn't get anything because several community members spoke against it and asked us to give it in writing that we would never return. There were even some among them who came over here later on - and did receive anything neither.

Another difficulty came now. To obtain a passport did cost means and ways into the colony's officials in the district office at Samara. The Russian clerks are slow till you give them something in their hands. So it came that the passport costs us 25-30 Rubel; Finally the passport got done and came to our hands. In it were listed all who wanted to emigrate. First my father and mother, then my brother Peter, his wife and child Alois, then Jakob with wife, with the statement of their age. I was 16 years and 6 months old. My sister Maria (Walter was 13 years old and 9 months; Michael Mayer went also with us, but he had his own passport.

Farewell

"As said above, brother Johann did not go with us and neither did sister Margaretha Koerner and Sister Emilie Schmitt, they stayed. It was in the morning of October 10, 1875, we all went to Mass and holy Communion and after Reverend Father's short address and his blessing, somebody came into the church, I guess it was Andreas Mayer and said we must hurry, the boat is ready for Saratow. When we came home we found our farmyard crowded as if it would go to a funeral. All our belongings packed and now we had to say goodbye. Many tears were shed and many kisses given. I still remember the farewell song which we often used to sing

when someone went traveling."

1. Auf ihr Bruder und seid stark,

Der Abschiedtag ist da :I

Es schlugt das Herz im Busen schwer,

Wir reisen uber Land und Meer

Zum freien Amerika.

Prepare, Brothers, and be strong

Departure day is here

Our hearts beat heavily in our breasts

We journey over land and sea

To America, the free.

2. An Russlandsgrenzen fullen wir

Mit Erde unsere Hand:

Und kussen sie aus heiterm Dank

Fur seine Pflege, Speis und Trank,

Du liebes, du liebes Vaterland.

At Russia's border we stretch our hand

To you, beloved fatherland

And with a kiss express our thanks

For all the care and food and drink

Which you provided us.

3. Und wenn des Merreswogen sich

An unserm Schiffe bricht,:

Dann segeln wir gelassen fort,

Denn Gott ist hier und Gott-ist dort,

Und Er verlasst uns nicht.

And the mighty sea waves break

Upon our ship

We will still sail on at peace

For God is here, as God is there

And he is always with us.